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Lonnie Bristow, MD
Chairman, Board of Trustees
American Medical Association
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Dear Dr. Bristow,

Thank you for your personal call to my office on Friday, September 17, 1992. I believe that your intended activity may have been misdirected, however, as your initial comments made reference to a paper by David Mantik, MD, PhD. My letter to you mentioned Mantik only tangentially, and was principally directed to other areas. Nevertheless, I was frankly surprised and disappointed by your comments to me.

My letter asked that the AMA Board respond to our multiauthor letter. On the phone you suggested that your unpleasant call was the only response we should expect. Your demeaning comment that, rather than seeking a response within our own organization, we write a book suggested an unexpected insensitivity to legitimate member concerns based on my understanding of the nature and function of an organization like the AMA. I and my coauthors were of opinion that the concerns of members are the *raison d'être* of the AMA. Is this incorrect? If our worry over the scientific and financial embarrassment of the AMA and its journal are not the proper concerns of AMA members, please correct our misunderstanding. You alone, despite your position within our organization, do not solely speak for every member or the management of the AMA. We previously wrote to request a formal response from the AMA regarding our concerns and I respectfully request that such be done. If this cannot be done through you personally and the Board of Trustees, please, as my AMA Board president, advise me on the appropriate grievance procedure.

The issues upon which we request a response from the AMA are:

1) George D Lundberg, MD's national, public use of our "AMA" logo to stand behind in making false and libelous public statements regarding the medical evidence in John Kennedy's death. As members who do not share his opinions, which Lundberg has himself admitted are opinions not based on any thorough knowledge of the subject, we wish to know if Lundberg was ever authorized by the AMA to use our official logo. We also wish to ask the AMA Board to clarify the use of the AMA logo. May this logo be freely used by any AMA member speaking on any topic he so chooses? If Lundberg was not authorized to use our logo, we wish the Board to request Lundberg not use it in the future unless authorized to do so.

2) Why did JAMA not publish a retraction of its false claim that AMA member, Charles Crenshaw, MD, was not in JFK's trauma room? As the members of the Board know from copies of the Warren Commission testimony I furnished of physicians also interviewed by JAMA, Crenshaw was 'irrefutably' present. More pertinently, within seven days of Lundberg's May 19, 1992 comments, it

BRISTOW
WAS
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BOARD OF
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THOSE DAYS -
HE'S NOW AMA
PRESIDENT.

became widely known from an article in the New York Times by Lawrence K. Altman, MD that Crenshaw was there.¹ His presence there was also claimed in a published letter to the editor of JAMA by Wayne Smith PhD (JAMA, 10-7-92). (Professor Smith has since published a stinging piece in the Columbia Journalism Review legitimately ridiculing JAMA's ludicrous claims of "irrefutable proof" for its JFK conclusions.²)

Your call suggested that no critical comment of the scientific content of JAMA was appropriate in correspondence with the AMA Board of Trustees. As I asked in my letter to you of 9-15-93, "If a medical editor is solely empowered with protecting that his journal publishes no slanderous and scientific falsehoods, and he fails to do so, who then will protect us against him?" If it is not appropriate to appeal to the Board for what we feel is a lowering of JAMA's standards, to whom may we appeal? Certainly not Lundberg.

Authors and editors of privately held publications are held responsible by owners for libelous errors, whether or not they result in legal costs. AMA employees, Lundberg and Mr. Dennis Breo, should also be held accountable to their employer. Both Lundberg and Breo should have ascertained the facts and dutifully reported them and corrected errors for JAMA readers as a matter of routine. More importantly, as scientists and physicians who may reasonably differ with Crenshaw's opinions, we must be concerned that the moral and scientific high ground has been ceded to Crenshaw by JAMA's false slanders. Lundberg's news conference comments reported on 5-20-92 in the New York Times about Crenshaw's "sad fabrication based on unsubstantiated allegations" revealed an ironically poor choice of words. JAMA's claims of Crenshaw's trauma room absence were themselves, indisputably, a 'sad fabrication based on unsubstantiated allegations' of Parkland physicians, including Charles Baxter, MD, who had sworn to the Warren Commission Crenshaw was present!^{3 4} Crenshaw tried to correct the record by publicly admitting to the Times that his coauthors exaggerated his involvement in JFK's care in his book, Conspiracy of Silence.⁵ JAMA has not made any similar attempt to correct its false claim of his nonparticipation. Nor, inexcusably, did Breo or Lundberg even seek comment from Crenshaw--a rudimentary journalistic obligation whose absence in JAMA's coverage was noted, critically, by the New York Times on 5-20-92. Therefore, JAMA, and by association, the AMA, seem to care less about the truth than Crenshaw!

JAMA's approach seems to have been to ignore the question of the true facts, and also ignore the possible legal and financial repercussions on the AMA's membership. Is that the appearance AMA, JAMA and Lundberg wish create? As a petitioner I, and my coauthors, wish AMA to know that our interest is in the truth, whether it supports or defames Crenshaw, or Lundberg and Breo, or both. We also think the truth is in the AMA's and JAMA's best interests. As a secondary concern, we AMA members are financially responsible for the legal costs of defending our employees, Lundberg and Breo. We believe that our members are due an explanation for their unusual journalistic behavior, as well as any possible legal, financial and scientifically compromising sequelae. The last thing the AMA needs in this trying time is public humiliation.

Thus, Dr. Bristow, our concerns pertain to the threat against the good reputation of our organization, as well as recent financial burdens and future liabilities foisted upon it because of the actions of the editor of JAMA and a staff writer. Please provide a formal response to our letter, and if you are unwilling to do so, please advise me of the applicable grievance procedure within the AMA.

I respectfully ask that you not communicate with me by telephone in the future for I fear that you and I cannot communicate as I believe fellow physicians should. I found your unfriendly tone

difficult to respond to in a cooperative, collegial manner. I have spoken with other Board members on this topic, including your predecessor, Dr Raymond Scalettar, and found no difficulty communicating in a spirit of mutual respect.

Truly yours,

Gary L Aguilar, MD

PS. As if to challenge, you asked me on the phone if I understood the function of an editor. The flow of the conversation did not afford me the opportunity to answer, but I believe the noted authority, Arthur Plotnik, has clarified for me what is not a good editor: "The one editorial skill that even the most philistine media executives can appreciate is the capability to sniff out trouble before it gets into print...The best editors become troubleshooters not to hold on to their jobs, however, but because they are decent human beings who don't want to hurt people by publishing false and damaging material...".⁶ (emphasis in original and added) "One hopes...that no editor would sink so low, even to attack the most universally despised public figure. Editors are morally bound...to take every precaution imaginable in verifying facts to assure that truth is being served when any member of society is being publicly kicked in the pants."⁷ (emphasis added) In my opinion, Dr Bristow, it is difficult to believe that Lundberg took 'every precaution'.

By Plotnik's reckoning, it appears, JAMA's editor has allowed himself to be described as having "sunk so low." More importantly, he has let stand the slanderous falsehood against a fellow AMA member in our scientific journal and withheld the truth from JAMA readers who may not have the New York Times to correct JAMA's "peer-reviewed" (Lundberg's term) 'facts'. Less importantly, Lundberg's actions may result in adverse consequences for both the AMA's and JAMA's finances and reputations.

As a final matter, what I found most unexpected in our conversation was your apparent disinterest in whether JAMA's claims against Crenshaw were true or false, and whether the self-contradicted, JFK autopsy pathologists' peculiar refusal to answer physician letters in JAMA was purposely intended to obscure the truth. I hope and trust I misunderstood you.

¹Altman, L K. 28 Years after Dallas, a doctor tells his story amid troubling doubts. New York Times, 5-26-92, p. C-3 (enclosed).

²Smith WS. JAMA knows best. Columbia Journalism Review, Sept/Oct 1993, p. 49-50.

³Altman, L K. 28 Years after Dallas, a doctor tells his story amid troubling doubts. New York Times, 5-26-92, p. C-3 (enclosed)

⁴Warren Commission, Volume 6:32, 40, 60, 80. See also Dallas Morning News, 11-23-63 (enclosed) in which Crenshaw's participation was repeatedly mentioned.

⁵IBID.

⁶Plotnik A. The Elements of Editing--A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists. 1982, New York, Macmillan. p50-51.

⁷IBID, p. 54.